

## NOVEMBER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

by President Tog Newman, Guest Columnist

*NASAA President Tog Newman is this month's guest columnist. Her report from the annual business meeting in Detroit follows a brief introduction.*

I'd like to share some of the insights from our Canadian counterparts and other speakers during our recent annual meeting in Detroit and then reflect on NASAA's accomplishments during the past year. First and foremost, I congratulate our Michigan hosts Betty Boone and her staff, the incomparable Betty Brooks and her host committee and our own NASAA Chair Judy Rapanos for their tremendous work on this year's memorable meeting, "Driving New Agendas."

For those who were able to join us in Windsor, I think you will agree with me that Senator Laurier LaPierre gave us one of the most heartfelt presentations on the importance of Canada's cultural identity. He said, "Culture is not a widget . . . [it is the] inalienable right of nations to tell their stories to themselves." Also of particular interest were the remarks of Dr. Shirley Thomson, director of the Canada Council for the Arts, and Eileen Mason, acting chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, both of whom offered perspectives on the role of government arts support.

We also had some very productive and exciting conversations with directors of the several Canadian provincial councils and NASAA will be following up on these contacts in the coming year. Before I talk more about the future I'd like to look at some of NASAA's accomplishments in the past year in meeting a challenging environment.

Since our conference in New York City in July 2001 with Americans for the Arts, the environment in which we live and work has changed in many ways. The events of September 11 not only brought us the grief of human loss, they

have heightened the sense of threat in everything we do. All of us have been affected and the healing role of the arts, as well as the power of the arts to help envision a better world, have never been more important.

Our work in state government has been affected as well by the prolonged economic downturn. By the beginning of fiscal year 2002, state governments were already monitoring a shortfall exceeding \$20 billion. Our best current estimate for that aggregate shortfall is now \$58 billion. We've just had the worst four quarters of state revenue decline since World War II. In response, various states are cutting budgets, tapping reserves and draining tobacco trust funds, and half the states are considering tax or fee increases. Line items are also coming under withering scrutiny. Increased security costs, the projection of continued double-digit growth in state health care obligations, and the lingering loss of tourism dollars in some states don't help the outlook for FY 2003.

I have found in my life — maybe you've experienced this too — that the family and friends with whom we love to share the good times assume a special importance when times are hard. I'm seeing this within the NASAA family as well. The membership's requests for information and assistance have poured in. In order to give our best guidance to staff in this changing environment, I have initiated monthly conference calls with NASAA's Executive Committee. In addition, the NASAA Board of Directors has devoted attention at each of our recent meetings to considering the question "What matters most?." Our staff is making an extraordinary effort to respond to your needs thoroughly and quickly. NASAA staff have visited a third of the member states this year, most frequently to assist with some aspect of strategic planning. In Arizona last November, when the executive directors, chairs and council members held joint leadership institutes, and again this July in Maine with the executive

directors, it seemed that the personal advice and support our members shared were just as important as the professional experience and knowledge shared.

What mattered most this year to the board included support to the membership as you adapt to change, protect and leverage resources, build partnerships, cultivate new constituencies, deliver effective services and fulfill leadership roles. Accordingly, we focused on cultivating our partnership with the National Governors Association, shaping an initiative with the National Conference of State Legislatures and fostering federal and state arts support partnership with the new administration in Washington. We successfully elicited high-level support from the NEA and the U.S. Department of Education to sustain the Arts Education Partnership. We also started the NASAA resource development office.

We continue to articulate the public benefit provided by state arts agencies to key audiences. This past year, we've seen some of the good results of these ongoing efforts. The Pew Charitable Trusts published Policy Partners: Making the Case for Investments in Culture. Its very useful content and format reflects in part the involvement of NASAA, which also served as the project's fiscal agent.

The Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation continues its work with 13 state arts agencies in which it has invested \$9.6 million to increase participation in the arts. And I am pleased to report that the NEA has increased its support to NASAA for services to the field to a new high.

I want to mention two partnerships that NASAA is nurturing on behalf of state

arts agencies that position us well for the long term. With support from the Packard Foundation, we partnered with the NEA, the Arts Education Partnership and the Kennedy Center to carry out the National Arts Education Leadership Network Initiative. This project had two parts, one that focused on the professional development of state arts agency arts education managers, and another that explored what could be accomplished when state arts agencies, state departments of education and statewide alliances for arts education work closely together. Member agencies will receive the report, entitled *For the Greater Good: Frameworks for Advancing State Arts Education Partnership*, shortly.

A new partnership for us is with the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. NASAA will be the cooperating organization to implement the Coming Up Taller awards, which recognize and promote the value of the arts in providing positive alternatives for at-risk youth. We are especially excited that this is the first year that these awards will include the participation of Mexico. Some of the most important investments that state arts agencies make to broaden participation in the arts in future years are in arts education and projects for young people. I am particularly pleased to see NASAA continue its leadership in these areas.

As you know so well, it's been a demanding year requiring a depth of professional resources and leadership, coupled with flexibility and understanding. NASAA, through the exhaustive efforts of its extremely talented staff, has certainly met every challenge along the way with competence and confidence. In our recent board meeting in Detroit we identified three priorities for the year ahead. They are:

- effective and strategic response to individual states' needs in the economic downturn
- building a strong policy partnership with the new NEA leadership
- expanding NASAA's resource base and capacity to deliver services through the implementation of the resource development plan

As the NASAA board and staff agree, the effective delivery of knowledge services to the membership and the strengthening of key coalitions and partnerships will be essential in addressing these priorities.

I look forward to these challenges, as well as the year ahead. Please know that I take great pride and pleasure in serving as your president.